

Project 1

Sounds out of silence

- Sound, time, ideas, and technique are the four corners of musical experience. Music results from dynamic relationships between them. To understand music we need to understand these relationships; to know how sound works, how they become musical ideas, and how those ideas, transformed by artistic techniques, can structure time.

Attentive Listening Activities

1.

- Sit very still: what can you hear? Identify all the sounds that can be heard where you are. Write them down. (Blindfolds?)
- Identify only the natural sounds (e.g.. breathing wind rustling leaves). Is it possible from where you are, or do you have to go somewhere else to hear any kind of natural sound?
- Identify sounds that result from human activity, invention and construction (e.g.. work sounds, mechanical and electrical sounds, recorded or electronically transmitted sounds).
- Identify sounds produced by natural forces reacting with human constructions (e.g.. wind whistling in overhead telephone or power lines).
- Identify patterns of sound.
- Identify highest and lowest pitched sounds.

2.

- Understanding a sound from the 'outside': find out how it is produced (ie. what force reacts with what substance and under what circumstances to produce the sound?).

3.

- Understanding a sound from the 'inside' by imitating it as closely as possible. Record a sound - (first day I will be the only one to record a sound). Listen to it many times to find out how it works. Notice particularly to the start of the sound (attack), how it goes on (envelope), and how it finishes (decay). Then try to imitate it with one or more voices. Record the imitation and compare it with the recording of the original sound.

4.

- Understanding sound textures by re-creating a sample (a) with voices and (b) with musical instruments. Either individually or in groups of five or less, sample by listening (not recording) 30 seconds of what can be heard where you are. Note carefully when in the 30 seconds particular sounds start and finish; which are high and which are low; which are in the foreground and which are in the background. Remember any special features. By imitating the sounds and the way in which they combine, try to give as accurate a representation as you can of the 30 - second 'timescape'.

5.

- Create in sound an idealized representation of a particular location (e.g.. a room in which certain kinds of sounds can be heard, a large hall, a swimming pool, field, wood, seashore, street, alley-way, public square, workshop). The location must be accessible; i.e. it is not sufficient merely to imagine it:

its soundscape must be experienced, if possible over a period of several hours either by remaining there or by visiting it from time to time. At the location listen attentively for three minutes. Make careful observation of the qualities and characteristics of every sound heard. Keep an accurate record. Allow a little time to pass, then take another three-minute sample. continue this way for as long as possible, gradually building up a detailed sound-file of that location (like a photograph resulting from multiple exposures on the same piece of film). Notice in particular the sounds that occur most frequently in all the samples: did those sounds give a special character to the place?

From all this evidence, devise a plan for making a texture of sounds that will suggest to a listener the essence of the place visited.

- How long should the pattern of sounds last?
 - Which sounds will start
 - What will be the steady state of the texture? Will some sounds come and go, or reappear?
 - How will you end it?
- Lay out this organization on a piece of paper. Invent symbols to represent the different sounds along a time line (higher pitches above the line, lower pitches below the line). When all the details of what happens and when it happens has been decided and carefully placed, experiment to find the best way to imitate the sounds. Work at individual sounds and at combinations of sounds until the whole structure can be performed satisfactorily with voices or instruments. When you can produce a distinctive and definitive sound evocation of the place visited, (record it ?) and present it to the class.

6.

- Create in sound a new and unusual imaginary landscape. Imitate or use recordings of easily identifiable sounds but organize them together in a short textural piece that evokes a strange and unreal place.